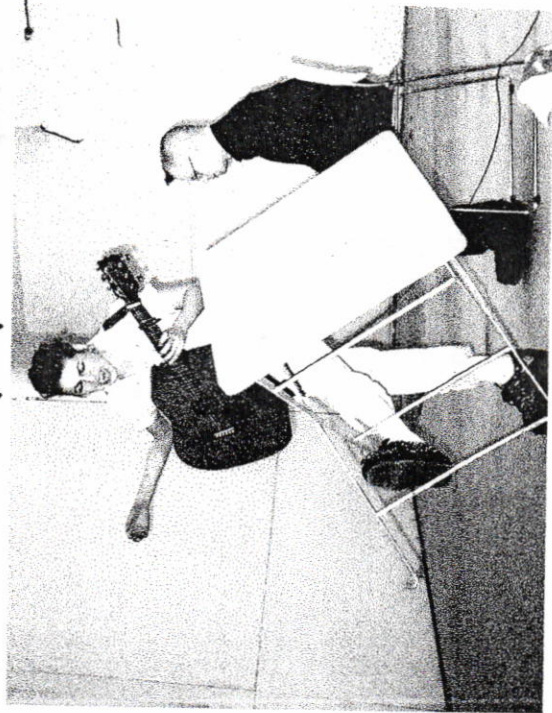




MFZINE

#2

with Curver, Reykjavic Museum of
Modern Art performance 8/03



INTRO

In a lot of ways, what we're wrestling with here neatly telescopes into the category of "Hate and War." When you live on a battlefield, as too many of us do, it doesn't much matter what Big Brother says. You know what war feels like. And you know what hate feels like from both sides. When people point out that you're walking around with a chip on your shoulder, you have to resist the urge to punch them in the teeth with your fist wrapped around a roll of quarters.

I know this feeling too. I know when I feel like a target, I know when I've been told my existence is an impossibility, and I know that we share a lot of knowledge, you and I. The fact that we're not alone helps with rage and isolation, but that doesn't make any-

ENDNOTES

The Motherfucking Clash is one girl, one guitar, and a whole lot of hairgrease. It's 1977 revisited on the acoustic tip.

You can find the band at radioMFC@hotmail.com, and on the Internet here:

<http://citypaper.net/articles/2003-09-04/musicpicks5.shtml>

http://www.philthmagazine.com/7_20_04/philth.html

(This one has some interesting access issues, in my opinion: you have to scroll down the "Features" column to find our name, and you have to scroll past some headlines and articles I don't personally support. Still and all, it's what some arty kids say about us. Another opinion. Another spelling of our name.)

is really about. Impression management and one-downsmanship for "authenticity..." which is so last millennium, anyhow.

I have an easy life.

I don't know where you are.

And I don't know what to say except that wherever you may be, I hope that you can go easy.

Step lightly.

Stay free.

thing easy. On any given day, you can watch me seethe with rage, yelling and working myself into a finger-pointing frenzy about issues such as fair and equitable distribution of refrigerator space in my house, wasting time digging up history to insult people I feel have wronged me in the past, or ranting about repulsiveness of the Atkins diet to anyone who will listen.

While I want to live a life that focuses on possibility, on positivity, of building together with hope and love the world we want to live in, I also know that hating can be fun. Sometimes it's easy to justify, right? When you live in a misogynistic, homophobic culture focused on consolidating and reinscribing an imperialist capitalist patriarchal white supremacy that leaves you out, hating those who hate you just seems logical. And it can be—survival is an act of resistance and an act of hope, too. Still and all, once you get past

survival level, or while you're busy struggling, how do you want things to be?

It's this simple binary I always find myself addressing: hate and war, or love and peace? Am I doing the Wrong Thing or the Right Thing? It comes back to *this* or *that*, two choices that may not fully reflect the scope of reality. We don't live in an either/or world, no matter how much authorities like to insist that there are limited choices.

So big ups to wrestling with ambiguity, to wrestling with ambivalence, to love and struggle and resistance and celebration and raccoons and candy and fill in the blank, please! Fill in the blanks with your "ands," and if you feel like it, drop me a line at radioMFC@hotmail.com to share the knowledge that we're not alone, that we are creating joy even in our grimmest hours.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'radioMFC'.

have a drink on him—but he's not there anymore. He has options they'll never have, and he's reminding them to watch out. It's a mix of nostalgia and condescension, tenderness and authority. This feeling resonates deeply with me, past and present.

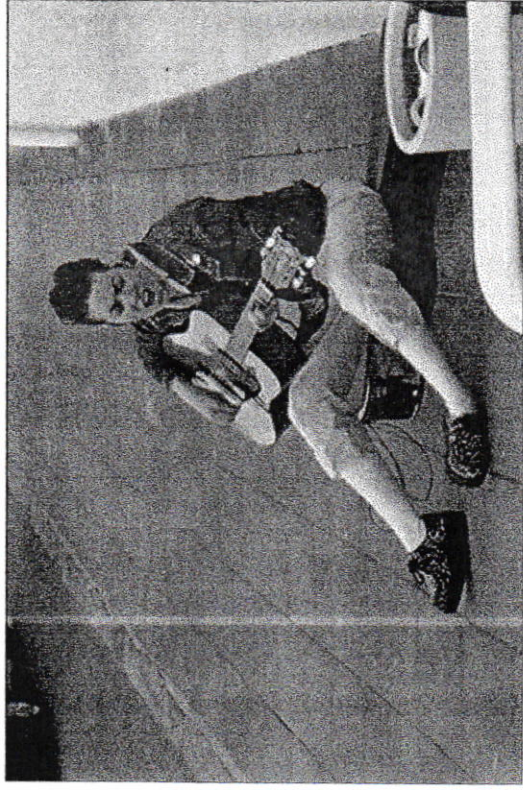
And as for me, I'm up in my room typing away at the computer. Using your name would be just another betrayal, another way I shore up my privileged identity with stabs at "authenticity," at stealing the half-glamorous aspects of your street life without having to live with the consequences. Besides, using your name here would mask another crucial aspect: the story's not about you, it's about me. Same as it ever was.

So instead of unpacking and performing your story as it overlaps with mine, I move into exegesis. Theory is safer than practice sometimes. So let's pull back again and cut to the chase: what this

out on the town to burn it to the cinders.

But we all know that those imagined glory days of youthful thug-gishness are not only never going to happen again, but that maybe they never really did. Not in the way we like to say in stories later, at least. We might never have participated to the level we pretend later. This is a revisionist history. We're performing our identity at the expense of others.

In the song, Mick smiles when he hears his friends are released from jail because he knows where they'll be—the pub. He can imagine them all there together, carousing and toasting and hatching plans. But he's not there, not there with them, and in his closing salvo, exhorting them to "go easy...step lightly...stay free," the difference in their lives is laid on the table. He can tell them to



A NOTE:

This zine is product and process of the Motherfucking Clash (The MFC), a Philadelphia-based performance project. The Motherfucking Clash is one girl, one guitar, and a whole lot of hair-grease—1977 revisited on the acoustic tip.

Much as I base this zine and my performance on the notion of the Clash as 'the only band that matters,' as Mass-Market Punx in capital letters, it's always a little ironic, you know, that this band that much of mainstream music culture lauds as Political, as Sensitive (and that I myself see as Prescient in many ways) ignores issues of gender, not to mention sexuality—which they don't.

So imagining the teenage Mick Jones in the song, running around with his thug friends but ducking back to his grandmother's council flat to practice guitar while his boys plan petty crime down at the local pub strikes a chord with me. The Mick-of-the-song, the protagonist Mick, who may easily be as mythical as any other creation—this Mick is talking about how tough they all were, getting in fights, getting kicked out of school. But he's in his room playing guitar, he's out forming bands while his friends are drinking and committing crimes, and they get caught. He doesn't. He can move anywhere he wants to go while they're locked down.

When circumstances or chance reveal the differences between you and your friends, showing you to be one of the lucky ones, it's easy to want to show loyalty. To write letters when your boys are in prison, promising them that when they get out, you're all going

It's sort of a Lennon-McCartney boyhood romp, overlapping with some of Mick Jones's public statements about his boyhood. This song is easily understood as Mick's story, Mick Jones describing his thug life as an early teen. I think it's meant to read as a Salad Days kind of song, of the way we were back then. An ode to fallen comrades.

What chills me is the real meaning: the way so many of us tell tall tales of danger-by-association from our street days, our punk days, bragging about our boys and girls who didn't make it through, taking their exploits as our own, all the while masking our own personal ease and privilege—like the personal ease and privilege of having a loving, stable family with a lot of resources to make sure I never ended up like the people I like to say I was so tight with back in the day.

It all gets back to that notion the participation in any culture, from subculture to monoculture, is open only to Citizens. Open to men. Plato to punks, it's still mostly boys' fun, at least in theory. Can we burn that down, please?

This issue of the MFZine is in two main sections: "Hate and War" and "Stay Free."

HATE AND WAR

*'Cos years have passed and things have changed
And I move anyway I wanna go
I'll never forget the feeling I got
When I heard that you'd got home
An' I'll never forget the smile on my face
'cos I knew where you would be
An' if you're in the Crown tonight
Have a drink on me
But go easy...step lightly...stay free*

“Stay Free” is a song my band never performs. It actually took me a long time to get into this ultra-bouncy nursery rhyme, but now that it's in my internal jukebox, its reverberations are so powerful that I don't think I can play it live.

*You were down the Crown planning your next move
I practised daily in my room
Go on a nicking spree
Hit the wrong guy
Each of you get three
Years in Brixton*

*I did my very best to write
How was Butlins?
Were the screws too tight?
When you lot get out
Were gonna hit the town
We'll burn it fuckin' down
To a cinder*

*And if I get aggression,
I give it to them two times back.
Everyday, it's just the same,
with hate and war on my back...*

How about this? When bragging about his lyrical skill and the unstoppable force of his DJ, Cut Creator, LL Cool J lets us know that "when my DJ cuts, girls move their butts." Um, okay...

Dancing is fun, don't get me wrong, but if MC means "move the crowd" like Rakim said, and the DJ still controls the party, why is it still assumed that men run the show and women glitter on the sidelines? Even in resistance cultures of so many stripes, Jean Smith's words ring true: "Man thinks 'woman' when he talks to me—something not quite right." To always be perceived as the other, to always be something a little different—think about the

old Straight Edge compliment where the best thing you can be is "hard." If you're a woman, you can maybe make it to the top and be a "hard girl," but even the language is reflecting the penis. Being a "hard girl" is not the same as being "hard." Being "hard" is something that, in this use of the word, leaves women out. Do you want to be part of the club, or do you want to be off on the sidelines in the Ladies' Auxiliary?

In my experiences, our punk antiheroes, urging us to break down those walls that divide us—they weren't that different. Cheers to all the women, queers, transpeople, and everyone who refuses to let that get in their way, people who simply keep struggling and celebrating inside and outside cultures that make little room for them. The point is not that when cultures and people oppress you that you are therefore powerless—just look around. There are

*We met when we were in school
Never took no shit from no one, we weren't fools
The teacher says we're dumb
We're only having fun
We piss on everyone
In the classroom*

*When we got thrown out I left without much fuss
An' weekends we'd go dancing
Down Streatham on the bus
You always made me laugh
Got me in bad fights
Play me pool all night
Smokin' menthol*

STAY FREE

plenty of folks who know that Frederick Douglass was right when he said "Power concedes nothing without demand," plenty of folks who demand and take power in all aspects of their lives. The point is that it is bogus and a waste of time to sit around watching folks congratulate themselves for bucking the system when they're just repeating the same old boring paradigm of I win-you lose, one up/one down, one boss, one way. My way or the highway. Might and right.

Anyhow. You probably already know where I'm coming from on this, and have your mind made up one way or another right now. Let's cut to the chase as I type out my diary.

1. PHOTOSHOOT

My band was invited to a photo shoot. I was told that we'd do a whole bunch of fancy pro photos with some arty lensmith, so when the big day came, I gamely suited up, pasted the pompadour into place, and piled into Ted's car to impression-manage at some loft space. I had a migraine, but psyched myself up to chat and be as charming as possible.

We show up at the space, and the photographer's not there yet. Our host lets us know he'll be leaving early since he has something more important to do, then he suggests that since he's never actually seen the band, we do a performance for him right there in his house. At this point, Ted and I are trading glances—the kinds of glances you trade with friends that say “what's up with this?”—

To see some spaces where women and girls are recognized as participants and creators on their own merit, check the Internet—www.girlsdj.com and www.plainparade.org are some Philly-town organizations looking to rock the bells while breaking down some walls. There are plenty more, of course, and I'm guessing that one of those spaces women and girls are recognized is in your head, in your heart, in your body.

my own real life, men and women get to define who they are on their own terms, and get to show love for themselves and others. Just 'cause it's not on TV doesn't mean it's not real—

Although I do have to check myself sometimes when the sevens collide. Like during Ladyfest Philly, riding my bike down South Street after hearing Kate Bornstein speak so powerfully about a vision a share, a vision of the world where we are all fully ourselves and valued because of that. I was feeling so in tune with the universe, with other people who are loving and struggling all in one, always. In a little bit of a dream world, I looked up to see two young white men walking down the sidewalk, taking up all the room so that people had to step into the street to pass them. Just some guys walking and talking. One was wearing a T-shirt that said "Don't Play Like A Girl."

but I say okay, I can improvise a performance. I improvise a performance because Ted's there to film me. That's why Ted's driving me around and by my side at this moment, because he's a filmmaker and doing a project about the Motherfucking Clash. His solidarity and belief helps calm my jangled nerves at this moment, in this loft, with this other dude and a whole bunch of cats.

There's a space in the loft that's decorated to look one part Masterpiece Theater library and one part hunting lodge. With all the dead animals, I start to feel like a specimen or trophy myself, and my snarl comes out. I drag the cord from my guitar's pickup around on the floor behind me as I perform in this dim corner.

Finally, we exchange one head honcho for another as the photographer shows up. We've been waiting for quite a while, and when he says he doesn't need photos, just some test shots "to prove you

were here," I'm confounded. He says he doesn't need photos since the publication will get stills from Ted—who knew nothing about this plan either.

So in the face of decreasing reward, abandoning the hope that I will receive a glossy stack of high-fashion MFC photos out of this event, I do some halfhearted posing for the man with the Polaroid camera.

As we get ready to leave, so I can go home and pass out with my migraine, the photographer asks me to sign a photo release.

Again, since he said he wasn't taking photos, I'm perplexed, but I sign it.

Then he asks how he should refer to me in print—by my birth name or by my band name. Before I can answer, he says "I guess

men take steroids and crack burp and fart jokes, we have the message that men and women should—like "The Real World"—hole up in Ikea'd-out houses in major American cities and spend their time getting drunk and having unprotected sex with each other in state-sanctioned man-woman dyads.

Underneath all this chasing around the apple tree is the notion that men and women are fundamentally different, fundamentally in opposition, trying to trick each other in have sex and trying to milk the other for all they're worth.

Mars and Venus hate each other, and should—that's what I'm hearing, anyway.

And blessedly, in my real life, while I always have to deal with fallout from Babylon, nothing could be further from the truth. In

what they most fear about the "opposite" sex (um, again—two sexes, two genders? I don't think so...), they say this:

Women are afraid men will kill them.

Men are afraid women will laugh at them.

Thinking about what it's like to walk down the street with your biggest worry that a woman's going to laugh at you is exaaaaactly the same as knowing that men have been killing women with relative impunity since time immemorial, and for all we know, you're next.

Oh, wait. That's sarcasm.

So alongside the new reinforcement of "gender norms," where women have bleached long hair, breast implants, long claws, and

I should ask Ted about that."

Ted is a great filmmaker, and a nice guy. He lives a principled life and seems to always demonstrate respect for all living creatures. How he could be perceived as the boss of me, the boss of my project, is beyond me, and I glance over at him to see how he registered that comment. He looks shocked.

I use my calm voice and say, "Actually, you should ask me," and tell him to use my band name for band references.

That idea—"should I ask him about you?"—is so stale that the geese in Fairmount Park won't touch it, right? At least that's what I thought. "Man thinks 'woman' when he talks to me—something not quite right." There's nothing wrong with me, and there's nothing wrong with my voice. Thanks for asking.

2. MARCH FOR WOMEN'S LIVES

Dana and I drove down to DC for the gigantic March for Women's Lives. There's a lot of debate about that march, which many women see as another showing of a white, middle class, mainstream feminist political agenda trumping all, but I went anyhow. Standing outside with hundreds of thousands of women, with people who made the effort to show up to say "Women's Lives Matter," was a moving experience, even as having to protest to ensure that women have a civil right or two, to organize around reproductive rights, is ridiculous—ridiculous that women's rights as human beings and citizens are so imperiled.

Dana and I had made some gorgeous flags on huge pieces of orange velveteen, turquoise velveteen, cream-colored lace, and we

If you watch TV or go to the movies or read the newspaper or spend any time in America, at least, you might have run into this notion that men and women hate and fear each other—and should. From reality TV to the *Metrosexual Handbook* (which in my mind is actually about reinscribing categorical boundaries between straight and gay men by saying "Hey dudes, you can clip your toenails now, and no one will call you a fag!" Um, progress?)

"*Metrosexual*" also comes a bit too close to those old notions about *how to trick women into fucking you*, gender is being written large as an either/or option: be a Man. Be a Woman. And of course being a Man or a Woman means playing up some of the saddest and most oppressive of stereotypes.

A lot of domestic-violence trainings like to drop science on folks, reminding people that when men and women are surveyed about

3. MARS AND VENUS HATE EACH OTHER

Have you seen a British Nestlé candy bar in a blue wrapper, a thick chunky chocolate with a pictogram for "woman" (black silhouette with a triangle skirt) inside the slash-out circle and the legend "it's not for girls?" In case you missed the subtle point, the wrapper also says "Don't feed the birds."

Is this the backlash against media depictions of women loving candy, of associations between women and chocolate? Somehow men are threatened by that relationship and need a candy bar for men? There's already Men's Pocky, dark chocolate-dipped starch straws that flesh out the Japanese Pocky family (crunchy almond, pink strawberry, etc.). Do we really need a candy bar that hates women?

marched waving our flags. Catholics for Choice had some drumming action going on, so we stayed by them and danced our way through DC. With two flags in my hand, little chicken legs in green tights pumping to the beat, someone commented I looked like I had been on drill team in high school. My high school didn't have any drill team, but I love a parade, and I was having a really good time.

A young white man came up to me, chatting with me as we marched. He turned to me and said "Say it loud!" I was all like, okay, um, yeah. He pointed to one of my flags, which said Say It Loud: CHOICE, and said "Say it loud" again to me. I think he was trying to be nice, but he was pointing his finger at me and sounded a little too close to commanding for my personal taste.

This guy had picked up one of Planned Parenthood's pink plastic

megaphones at some point, so he held it up to his lips and yelled "CHOICE!" He held it out to me, and I said that my hands were full, gesturing with my three-foot flags, declining to take the megaphone from him.

Then he stuck the end of the megaphone in my mouth.

When I jerked my head back and he took the megaphone away, I told him that there was spit in the megaphone. He started to joke about how that was gross, until I looked him in the eye and in a steely voice told him that he stuck the megaphone into my mouth without asking me—of course there's going to be spit. He looked taken aback when I reminded him I didn't have much choice about what he did.

Then he tried to joke about it—"I'm not going to touch that," not

going to touch my comment about him forcing a megaphone in my mouth against my will, not going to touch the fact that I didn't give a good goddamn whether or not he liked having my spit on his little dinky megaphone.

As he hustled away, finally realizing he had crossed a few boundaries, I was thinking, Thanks for the solidarity, white dude at a rally for women's lives...

The roots run deep.